



The movement to preventing HIV/AIDS in Aruba launches a strong campaign aimed at the island's youth

Though the problem of the growing epidemic of HIV/AIDS is minimal in Aruba, it is never an issue to be ignored. Ignorance is not bliss in the case of HIV/AIDS; it is an invitation to sickness and despair. The UNAIDS Theme Group Aruba, backed by other organizations such as the Women's Club and UNESCO, and the Anglican Church of Aruba under Father Jacobs are taking action to see that HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention is a major concern of the island's youth.

To this end, The UNAIDS Theme Group Aruba was proud to baptize a new CD by the popular local artists Chao Tromp and Daddy Bass of the group Honeypot titled "No Turning Back." With music by Chao and lyrics by Daddy Bass, the driving hip-hop beat that is so popular with young people today carries a message of being mindful of one's actions, realizing the consequences, and being aware that once one has contracted AIDS, there is "no turning back."

The traditional "CD Baptismo" was conducted at the Surfside Marina on Thursday evening, and it was accompanied by interesting and informative speeches from James Oduber of UNESCO, and Ruben Odor, one of Aruba's few PLWA (people living with AIDS.) The introduction of this CD at this moment is particularly pertinent as Aruba had visiting the island Dr. Marcus Lashley of Barbados, a Clinical Consultant to the Caribbean Congress of Churches, (CCC) and Mrs. Lana Connor – Hoyoung of Anguilla, PRO for the Methodist Caribbean Church Association of Woman. This was Dr. Lashley's second visit to the island as part of an educational workshop program that travels from island to island in the Caribbean. Last year the first such workshop was conducted in the Anglican Church of Aruba in San Nicolas under the auspices of Father Jacob. This year Dr. Lashley was joined by Mrs. Connor-Hoyoung and Dr. Brendan Bain- Professor of Community Health and Psychiatry, U.W.I. Jamaica, Director of Caribbean HIV/AIDS Regional Training Network. They acted as facilitators to a series of workshops held at the San Nicolas YMCA which was, in their opinion, well attended by leaders of local church groups, such as the Methodist and Catholic denominations, and some of the island's youth. Dr. Lashley pointed out that last year's program focused on HIV/AIDS education, and this year's program focused on advocacy. The workshop title, "Women – Sex- & HIV/AIDS" had the objective of challenging the women of our community to become pro-active agents for social and behavioral change amongst men and women, and to join the struggle against all forms of violence on women, girls and children. This aspect of the spread of AIDS is one of the most tragic, as it focuses on the problems of society that does not allow women the control over their lives, and so to actively prevent contracting AIDS. In general, Aruban women are more educated and self-determined than those in the surrounding areas, but their taking an active role in prevention is still an issue. "Advocacy is about empowerment," explains Mrs. Connor-Hoyoung, "we find throughout the region that the occurrence of HIV/AIDS amongst women is constantly increasing. The family structure is under attack, and we find women are suffering more because of economic conditions, and having to accept (violence against them or making a living in prostitution) because of low economic status. So some of the things we are looking at when we talk about Advocacy are the causes, looking at poverty as it relates to HIV/AIDS and as it relates to women. We are trying to instigate programs for women that help them to increase their self-esteem, teaching them to say "No" when it is important, or to take action."

Dr. Lashley described his recent visit as very encouraging, as he has found since last year that Aruba has had no new cases of HIV/AIDS and is experiencing zero growth of this dreaded disease. He declared that he finds the island's youth very "interested and concerned" and that Father Jacob's work over the last year has really reached them.

As the UNESCO representative in Aruba, James Oduber came to the podium to discuss the problem worldwide, and some statistics published at the end of 2004 in from a UNAIDS research project titled "A CULTURAL APPROACH TO HIV/AIDS PREVENTION AND CARE." Their findings at the time cited that there were thirty-nine million people around the world living with HIV/AIDS, of which two million were under fifteen years of age. This study was of statistics complete at the end of 2004, and experts are certain that the numbers have increased in the ensuing two years. Though there is an annual UNAIDS march to raise awareness, the continued spread of this dread disease has not taken up headlines as it used to, and this can only contribute to its dissemination. Each new group of young people approaching the age of sexual activity must be made aware of the dangers that await them, and the necessary measures to prevent all Sexually Transmitted Diseases, not only HIV/AIDS, which is a killer. This is the purpose of the CCC, as the work will never end. The CD by Chao and Daddy Bass is a step towards getting the message to

young people in a way that will get their attention. The CD was awarded to various individuals that are active in HIV/AIDS awareness, including Dina Maria, and Bernadette Schouten, President of the Women's Club of Aruba, along with a number of its members. It is available in limited quantities, but youth counseling organizations are encouraged to obtain one at the Offices of Disease Control located behind Bon Bini Bazaar in Oranjestad. For more information contact telephone # 582-3040.